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LESSON LEARNED

Disaster Assistance Registries: Conducting Outreach Through Trusted Organizations

SUMMARY

Planners for populations with disabilities and other functional needs should consider leveraging relationships with community-based organizations (CBOs) and faith-based organizations (FBOs) or other trusted sources to publicize their disaster assistance registry and to encourage personal preparedness and response activities. Promoting a registry to eligible individuals through trusted organizations can result in increased participation in the registry.

DESCRIPTION

The Dane County, Wisconsin, Department of Emergency Management operates a disaster assistance registry called the Disaster Assistance Voluntary Registry. The registry is a database of individuals who require evacuation, transportation, or other assistance during an incident. It is supported by geographic information system technology that allows personnel to identify registrants who might be located in impacted areas during evacuations or incidents.

Dane County is the second most populous county in Wisconsin. It contains the state capital, Madison, and is home to the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Initially, the Department of Emergency Management relied on traditional information campaigns to promote the registry. These campaigns targeted potential registry participants through public messaging, such as newspaper advertisements or public service announcements. However, departmental personnel found that these campaigns did not sufficiently draw individuals to the registry and that the impact of the public messages quickly faded.

Disaster assistance registries are also called special needs registries in some jurisdictions.

In response, departmental personnel investigated effective ways of promoting the registry to potential registrants and realized that individuals would be more likely to respond to trusted sources than to public messaging. These trusted sources include organizations and entities that individuals with disabilities and other functional needs interact with closely and on a sustained basis, such as CBOs, FBOs, churches, support groups, and personal care service providers.

Visit the [Emergency Planning for Persons with Disabilities and Special Needs](#) page on *Lessons Learned Information Sharing (LLIS.gov)* for additional resources on disaster assistance registries, including *LLIS.gov's* Practice Note, [Disabilities and Other Special Needs: Monroe County, Florida's Strategy to Promote its Special Needs Registry](#).

Department of Emergency Management personnel reached out to various CBOs and FBOs to solicit their support in promoting registry participation, and the result was overwhelmingly

positive. The CBOs and FBOs wanted to help their clients, but needed support from the Department of Emergency Management to inform their clients of the registry's advantages. As a result, Department of Emergency Management personnel held five focus groups with various CBOs and FBOs to determine what resources these organizations would need to promote the registry. Personnel wanted to understand any challenges or barriers that organizations would face in promoting the registry to their clients. Based on this information, personnel produced tailored informational materials for use by these organizations to assist them with publicizing the registry.

In addition to informational materials, the Department of Emergency Management provides organizations with three items to pass along to their clients to promote the registry and to encourage personal preparedness, including a document that explains the registry, a form encouraging personal preparedness, and a refrigerator magnet defining the elements of personal preparedness. As a result of the Department of Emergency Management's outreach efforts, participation in the registry is growing; personnel expect interest in and understanding of the registry to increase.

Planners for populations with disabilities and other functional needs should consider leveraging relationships with CBOs and FBOs or other trusted sources to publicize their disaster assistance registry and to encourage other personal preparedness and response activities. Promoting a registry to eligible individuals through trusted organizations can result in increased participation in the registry.

CITATION

Steinhauer, Michael. Special Needs Planner, Dane County Department of Emergency Management. Interview with *Lessons Learned Information Sharing*, 18 Aug 2010.

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